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TATION MANAGEMENT EIS

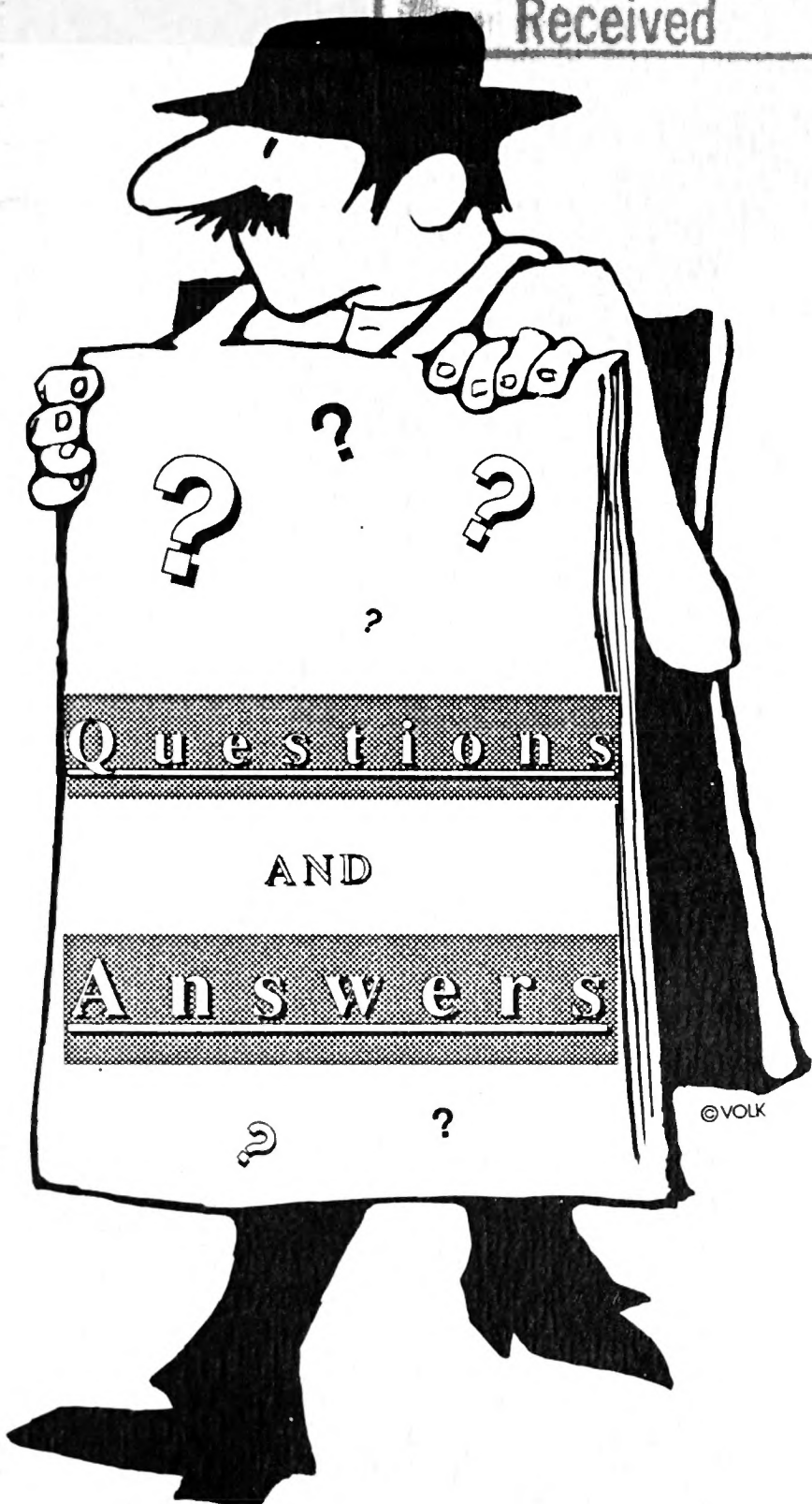
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U.S.D.A., NAL

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Received



Q. What does vegetation management mean? I haven't heard the term very often.

A. A simple definition of management is to direct or control. So, vegetation management is often said to be control of unwanted plants. Stated more positively, the Forest Service manages vegetation for some public benefit: for wildlife food or shelter, for wood products, for recreation, for safety,

Q. Why "manage" vegetation at all? Can't nature do that by herself?

A. Forests are expected to provide outputs like recreation, wood, water, wildlife, and forage and to coexist with modern society. Producing these outputs and protecting society from threats like insects, diseases, and wildfires usually requires vegetation management. This means "just letting nature manage" is a very risky alternative, because doing nothing would gradually diminish the capacity of forests to produce many outputs like recreation (national forests are the number one producer of outdoor recreation in the nation), or wood products (national forests hold a 25 percent share of the wood products market), or possibly even employment (national forests generate about 1/2 million jobs in the private sector). However, managing doesn't mean doing things contrary to nature; often it's just speeding up or slowing natural processes to achieve the desired output in harmony with nature.

Q. Most of us are deeply concerned about effects on wildlife, water, humans, soil, and so on. Vegetation management sounds like growing pine farms, and I just don't see how it helps any of these other resources.

A. Forests are managed for multiple uses, many of which benefit from vegetation management. Though timber management is usually thought of as the most obvious place for vegetation management, it is actually only about 11 percent

of the annual total. Vegetation management is needed for safe operation and maintenance of electric lines and roads and is essential to reduce risks of damage from wildfires. In addition, it produces food and cover for wildlife and keeps trails clear of brush and vines. The EIS looks at a variety of ways to have multiple uses while being responsive to people's concerns about effects.

Q. What's the difference between what I see now and what I can expect to see later, after the EIS is done?

A. Most importantly, the number of acres treated overall won't change. If the preferred alternative is implemented, most impacts should be less obvious to the viewer because this alternative emphasizes less intensive treatments. Because mechanical treatments are substantially reduced and because lower intensity fire will be used, there will be less soil exposure (thus a reduction in that visual effect). Managers are also urged to look for opportunities to improve appearances along corridors by considering timing, intensity, and compatible uses. The increase in herbicide use causes a visual impact due to browning vegetation, but again, managers are urged to reduce this impact by considering timing and intensity as well as giving special consideration to travelways.

Q. This is very confusing. First, we had Forest Plans to address all these problems, but now you're doing another EIS. Will the Forest Service use this EIS to increase timber harvests or to justify building more roads?

A. Some of the goals in Forest Plans involve timber harvest and road construction. This EIS does not change those goals in any way. Rather it evaluates the effects of vegetation management needed to reach them. This need for vegetation management is clearly identified in Forest Plans but usually not analyzed in detail, as is done in this EIS. For example, all plans show that site

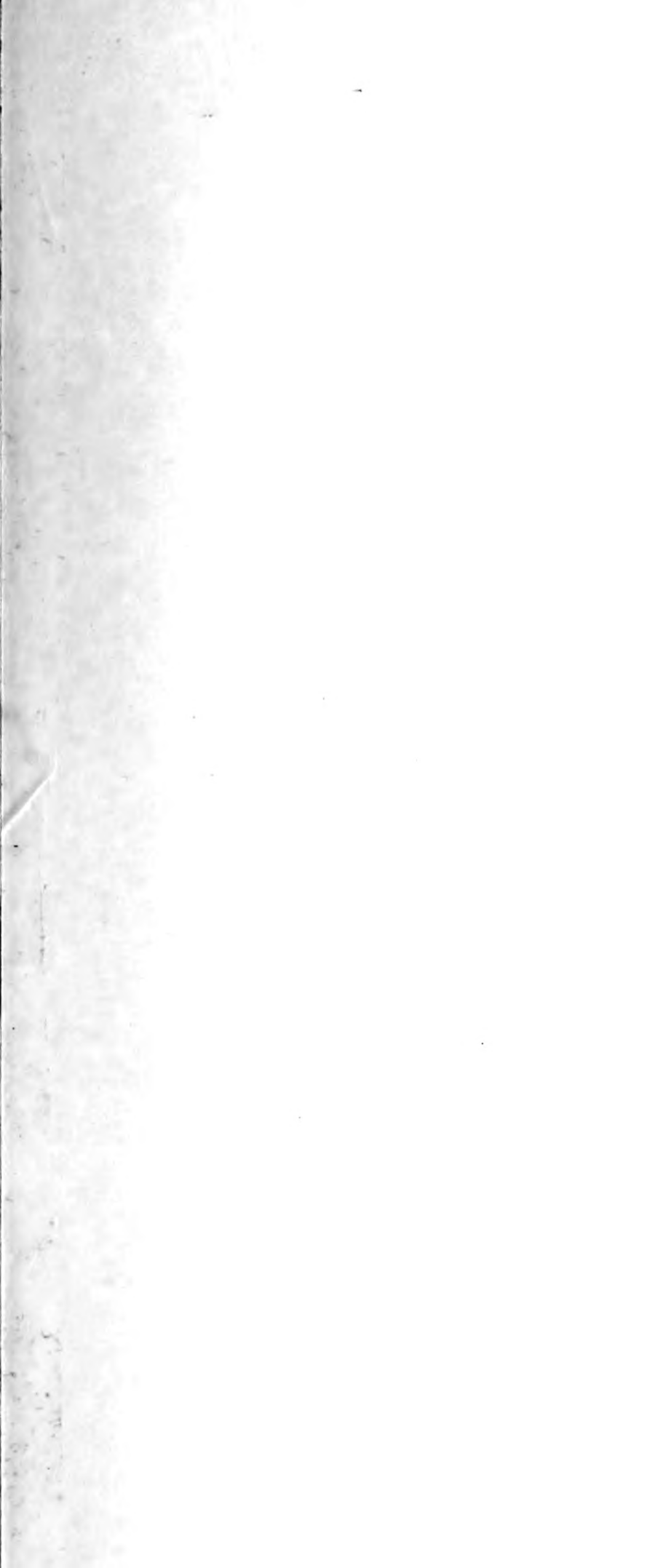
preparation is needed but don't make comparisons between effects from different methods that could be used to do site preparation.

Q. How did you decide on the preferred alternative and why is it preferred?

A. When we looked for a "preferred" alternative, we sought one which responded well to concerns raised by the public, and one which promoted forest health and met output goals set by Forest Plans. Eight alternatives, ranging from no treatments at all to highly intensive use of machines, fire, and herbicides, were fully studied. Those alternatives allowing no management, or, at the other extreme, highly intensive management posed unacceptable risks. The preferred alternative reduces the intensity of all methods from current levels, and though it calls for an increase in acres treated with herbicides, it mandates application methods and herbicide selection standards that minimize risks to people, wildlife, and non-target plants.

Q. How can the preferred alternative recommend such an increase in herbicide treatments when so many people expressed concern about herbicide effects on humans, wildlife, and water? Is the Forest Service ignoring public comment?

A. First, be assured that public comment has not been ignored. While some people prefer that herbicides not be used at all, most people want better studies and more precautions. The analysis (particularly the risk assessment) reviewed hundreds of research papers to learn as much as possible about herbicide effects. Additionally, wherever effects could be lessened or prevented, precautions (called mitigation measures) were written. For example, buffer strips are left untreated near streams, wells, and private lands. Consider, too, that people are concerned about all kinds of effects (not just those from herbicides). In spite of the large increase in herbicide treatments, the preferred alternative allows fewer of these negative environmental effects than currently.



Q. The preferred alternative shows 7,000 acres being treated with herbicides applied by helicopters. Does this mean that 7,000 acres will be treated every year?

A. No. As a matter of fact, all acreage figures used in the EIS are our best estimates of what an average program would be. In some years many more or many less acres could be treated, but over several years the average would be 7,000 acres, or less than 15 percent of all herbicide treatments. Forest Service managers aren't obligated to treat 7,000 acres by aerial application: they simply have this technique available to them (one of many tools in their tool box).

Q. How can we be sure the analysis of herbicides is accurate? We understand that most of the data came from EPA or directly from the chemical companies.

A. When dealing with such sensitive issues as possible effects on humans, it is important to obtain the best information. The chemical companies and EPA have technical information not available any place else. It would not make sense to ignore this information, but data were also collected from many other sources. Then, to check accuracy and reliability, the analysis was reviewed by numerous toxicologists, medical professionals, chemists, and other scientists, many of whom are independent of the chemical companies and government.

Q. What about effects on non-targets? Won't herbicides kill anything they get on?

A. One reason 11 herbicides are evaluated is that each controls only certain kinds of plants. A single herbicide usually won't kill every kind of plant. Additionally, the way herbicides are applied (broadcast vs. selective) determines possible effects on non-targets. All of the other methods (fire, mechanical, manual, and biological) may also affect non-targets. Regardless of the method used, some precautions (mitigation measures) are used to limit these effects.



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Q. It sounds like the Forest Service has decided what to do; alternative: and you have a lot of data to support your position. What if I have more information that would change things?

A. Right now, as a member of the public you are reviewing the Draft EIS. By August 25, 1988, this review period will be over. The purpose of this review is to give everyone a chance to see if the analysis was done well and to provide additional information. No decision is made by the Forest Service until the Regional Forester publishes his record of decision (sometime after the review period). Comments sent in during the review period could possibly change the preferred alternative or cause additional analysis to be done.

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